

Archaeological Seminar on the Prehistory and Protohistory of Ceylon, 21 August 1970

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DURING THE summer of 1970 Ceylon had three teams of American archaeologists, sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution, working on the prehistory and protohistory of Ceylon. The projects were conducted in collaboration with the Archaeological Department of Ceylon.

The most senior of the archaeologists was Wilhelm Solheim of the University of Hawaii. Assisted by Mei Mei Burke, a graduate student from Hawaii, and S. Deraniyagala, Assistant Commissioner (Excavations) of the Archaeological Department of Ceylon, he explored the east coast of Ceylon for data indicating prehistoric and protohistoric contacts between Ceylon and Southeast Asia. Attention was focused on possible landing sites bordering sheltered waters along the coast between Kokkilai and Kumana, and included the extensive floodplain of the lower Mahavili River. Although the results were not very rewarding with reference to the primary aim of the project, considerable light was thrown on the early and middle historic phases.

K. A. R. Kennedy of the Anthropology Department of Cornell University, working in collaboration with S. Deraniyagala, re-excavated the well-known mesolithic burial site of Bellan-bandi palassa, which since 1956 had produced skeletal remains of over 11 humans, and secured fresh data on the stratigraphy and artifactual evolution of the site.

Bennet Bronson, W. Begley, and Mr. Mahroof comprised a team from the University of Pennsylvania which excavated Kantarodai in north Ceylon. The sequence which was revealed confirmed that obtained by K. de B. Codrington and S. Deraniyagala in the spring of 1969 for Anuradhapura: Ceylon's iron age, unlike south India's, had not been preceded by a neolithic or chalcolithic.

The Pennsylvania team, in collaboration with K. A. R. Kennedy, excavated the early iron age burial site at Pomparippu in northwestern Ceylon. Significant light was thrown on the burial practices.

In August 1970 the Honourable Minister of Cultural Affairs convened a seminar conducted by the visiting teams on the work they had been doing in Ceylon. The tenor of his introductory speech, and that of the Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, N. Wijeyeratne, was extremely heartening. Prehistory and efficient methodology were recognized as being the backbone of modern archaeology. A new era appeared to have dawned to those prehistorians who have lived under the cloud of monumental and epigraphical archaeology since the inception of the Archaeological Department of Ceylon. The talks stimulated much interest. Among the speakers was R. H. de Silva, the Commissioner of Archaeology, who presented an overview of the early iron-age burial types of Ceylon.

The picture which emerged was that of a mesolithic, akin to the early Hoabinhian of Southeast Asia, succeeded by a full-fledged iron-using culture with strong affinities to the "megalithic culture" of peninsular India. This in turn was succeeded by a sophisticated culture phase with deluxe rouletted ware of ca. 100 B.C.—A.D. 100.

The foreign experts pointed out the necessity of the application of up-to-date methods, particularly in the analytical field which is the forte of American archaeologists. They also stressed the importance of prompt and exhaustive publication of the results of each project before embarking upon another. It was pleasing, if not flattering, to hear them speak in superlative terms of praise of the handful of Ceylonese archaeologists who are now grappling with problems requiring a considerable amount of trained manpower, which is available only as a small fraction of what is needed.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

DERANIYAGALA, P. E. P.

- 1971 Subdivision of the prehistoric archaeology of Ceylon. *Actes du VII^e Congrès International des Sciences Préhistoriques et Protohistoriques* (Prague, 21–27 August, 1966), vol. 1, pp. 146–154.

Animal fossils are utilized in dating the "Ratnapura culture phase." The later phase is the "Balangoda culture phase." The neanderthaloid, australoid, negroid, and other skeletal characteristics of Balangoda Man are discussed.

The Tabbova-Maradammaduva culture is briefly dealt with in another paper (p. 124). It is probably a fertility cult and comprises crude, stylized terra-cotta statuettes mixed with Greco-Roman types, hermaphroditic ones, and those of elephants, parrots, etc.

DERANIYAGALA, S. U.

- 1971a Prehistoric Ceylon—a summary in 1968. *Ancient Ceylon* [Journal of the Archaeological Survey of Ceylon], pp. 3–47, pls. 16, text figs. 8.

Summarizes the work done on Shivalik animals and on Stone culture humans and points out a number of new conclusions therefrom.

- 1971b Stone implements from a Balangoda culture site in Ceylon—Bellan Bandi Palassa. *Ancient Ceylon*, pp. 47–89, pls. 18, text figs. 19.

The large collection secured in association with the skeletons of *Homo sapiens balangodensis* is worked out and grouped into thirty basic types with subdivisions.